

The Association For Rational Thought News
Practicing The Art Of Rational Thinking In Everyday Life
Volume 3, No. 1
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The Association for Rational Thought is a new organization committed to encouraging rational, well-informed evaluation of fringe-science, pseudoscience, and paranormal claims. A.R.T. encourages the investigation of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible, scientific viewpoint and the distribution of the results of such investigations to the public. You are cordially invited to become a member of A.R.T.
Membership Meeting Saturday, Oct. 9

James Randi videotape: "Pseudoscience and the Paranormal in Eastern Europe and the World"

The first meeting of the 1993-94 A.R.T. season will be held at 10:00 A.M. at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building (driving instructions included elsewhere in this issue). Joe Gastright will present a videotape of CSICOP Fellow James Randi's 1992 talk to The Skeptics Society of Pasadena, California. The famed magician and scientific investigator challenges fuzzy thinking with wit, wisdom and common sense as he explains his approach to investigating paranormal claims and updates us on the recent growth of pseudoscience in Eastern Europe.

Come enjoy the tape and discussion afterwards. Lunch and more lively conversation across the street at James Tavern after the meeting.

Lance Moody Takes on Media Resource Job

Lance Moody undertook the job of Media Resources Coordinator for A. R. T. on June 25. The Media Resources Coordinator chairs a Scientific and Technical Consulting Committee which will organize and maintain a pool of experts who are available to respond to inquiries made by the media about pseudoscientific or paranormal phenomena. Lance plans to develop two ways to respond to media requests for information on paranormal topics: a file of short statements of A.R.T.'s position on paranormal topics and a list of names of experts in various fields to whom media could be referred.

A.R.T.'s most important task, together with investigating allegedly paranormal events, is maintaining a flow of accurate, scientific information to a credulous public. Here is a solid opportunity to help promote scientific thinking. Call Lance at 733-1332 to offer your help with this important work.

Volunteers Needed!

Executive Council Short Two Officers

A.R.T.'s present officers are President, Keith Brabender; Vice-President, Dick McGrath; Corresponding Secretary and Publicity Coordinator, Mary Pacinda; Treasurer, Peggy Borger; Membership Secretary, Roy Auerbach; Investigations Officer, Joe Gastright; Newsletter Editor, Virginia Jergens; and Media Resources Coordinator, Lance Moody.

We lack a Recording Secretary and a Meeting Organizer. The Recording Secretary takes minutes at Membership and Executive Council meetings. The Meeting Organizer chairs a committee which chooses topics for meetings and introduces the program at each meeting.

Please call Keith Brabender if you are interested in volunteering for one of these jobs. Your term of office will begin the day you take up the challenge and extend through April, 1994. Get involved! Being an involved skeptic is twice as much fun as being a sideline skeptic, and provides a truly useful service to the community.

Skeptics on the Electronic Superhighway

A computer online service with a skeptics' forum can provide plenty of opportunities for the skeptic interested in locating information on topics of skeptical interest and exchanging opinions with both skeptics and believers. Here is information about two such forums.

Productivity Online

Thanks to Membership Chair Roy Auerbach, Cincinnati area skeptics now have their own forum on Productivity Online, a local on-line computer service. Productivity Online (POL) was organized by Richard Blumberg in order to "enrich and empower those who are using small computers professionally and creatively." POL provides communications and information resources for both Mac and Windows users. Administrators, in addition to Richard Blumberg, are Rick Dieringer, Lynn Estomin, and Becky Pranger.

POL include the Skeptics Forum founded by Roy for the exchange of information and opinion among local skeptics. This experimental on-line service is provided at the present time without charge, so it is a perfect place to exercise your skeptical thinking and computer communications skills. On the Skeptics Forum you can join Roy and A.R.T. members Joe Gastright, Lance Moody, and Virginia Jergens and other skeptics in reading and contributing information and opinions on a variety of topics. In addition you can "chat" on-line with other skeptics and download text files and software that interest you.

You can access POL either through a general communications program (e.g.. White Knight for Mac users) using 723-4444 as your modem access phone number or through First Class software, using the same number. The Mac version of First Class is available from any A.R.T. member already using the service. Both the Mac and the Windows version are available from Productivity Online at 299-4723.

Compuserve's Paranormal Section

For readers who subscribe to Compuserve, a national online service, another skeptical forum is available, the Paranormal Section of the Issues Forum (GO ISSUES, select Section 10, Paranormal.) The Issues Forum is one of Compuserve's "extended services," offered at \$8.00 an hour in addition to your regular monthly charge of \$8.95. In the Paranormal Section you can chat with other skeptics or believers, send and receive messages, and read or download a wide variety of material of interest to skeptics. A recent tour of the Paranormal Section suggested that UFO's are the heavy favorite right now, although many other topics are under discussion, including Big Foot, crop circles and an alleged "incoming planetoid." The library of text documents maintained on the section includes an international selection of articles, reports, and discussions, mostly on UFO's, but including many other topics.

To access Compuserve from a Mac using the Compuserve Information Manager for the Macintosh, MACCIM version 2.2, you need a Mac Plus or later model Macintosh, 1 megabyte RAM memory for System 6 (2 megabytes RAM for System 7), a hard disk drive (no size specified), Mac System 6.0.4 or later, and a modem, Hayes-compatible recommended. For equipment requirements for DOS machines, call Compuserve at 1-800-848- 8990. Compuserve introductory packages for Mac or DOS machines, including handbook, software, and logon instructions are available at local computer stores. One month's free use comes with the package.

I am available on Productivity Online under V. H. Jergens, and on Compuserve at V. H. Jergens, 75210, 3465, and check my e-mail nearly every day. Join the fun, and let me know what you are doing. I am especially interested in hearing about any other online forums concerned with issues of interest to skeptics.--The Editor.

Book Reviews

Unhappy? Out of sorts? Forced to watch rape, torture and cannibalism as a child? Here's the cure for all your misery--
Book Review

Breaking the Circle of Satanic Ritual Abuse: Recognizing and Recovering from the Hidden Trauma, by Daniel Ryder.

Daniel Ryder, the author of Breaking the Circle of Satanic Ritual Abuse, boldly asserts that many children are sexually and otherwise abused in Satanic rituals but that few consciously remember it. He believes that demons organize and support Satanic cults and physically participate in the ceremonial abuse. Extrasensory perception (ESP) is part of the Satanic rituals. Ryder also believes that adults who were abused in Satanic rituals as children but do not remember it suffer from psychological ills.

He claims to cure such ills by enabling "patients" to "remember" these events through "therapy." The process begins by reassuring the patient that recovery is possible and introducing the patient to books about Satanic ritual abuse. The books contain graphic descriptions of "memories" of other recovered patients and a clinical step-by-step examination of

the recovery process. Such stories may suggest to the patients what the supposed abuse entails, and lead the patients to conclude that almost anything they say will be accepted at face value, that their memories are true in every detail, and that no corroboration is required. If patients fail to remember that their parents were involved in Satanic ritual abuse, more reading material is offered. Visualization exercises help patients "remember" other people who may have been involved as well. (Psychologists call this process of leading a patient to "remember" events which did not occur "fabrication."--Ed.)

After dredging up "memories" of the abuse, the patient joins a twelve step Satanic ritual abuse recovery program. "Angels" can be used as part of the healing process. Presumably these are actual spirits.

The author hopes that his own book will be used as a source in treating Satanic ritual abuse. Towards that end he includes extremely graphic and often repulsive and nauseating stories "remembered" by supposed victims of Satanic abuse about what was done to them, their feelings, and their recovery.

According to the dust jacket, Ryder is a licensed social worker and a certified chemical dependency counselor. Apparently he is not a psychologist or a psychiatrist. There is nothing in the book to indicate that he has been trained to do psychotherapy. Invoking the help of angels is not a recognized therapeutic tool, and requires more evidence to convince us than he provides. The course of therapy he outlines can cause patients to fabricate "memories" of events which did not occur, rather than merely uncovering memories, as he claims. Fabrication is known to occur in some therapies for recovery from incest.

The stories Ryder supplies are first person narratives with no interpretation, and are intended to be believed at face value. The author gives no evidence that these story-tellers exist or were treated by reputable therapists. Many of the stories he admits are composites. The publisher finds it necessary to warn the reader that it does not "endorse any ritual abuse therapies, recovery groups, or organizations." Perhaps the publisher believes this disclaimer will save it from later embarrassment or from a lawsuit.

Your tax dollars have bought copies of this book for the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County--Peggy Borger.

The Origins of Humanity According to Sagan--Book Review

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors: A Search for Who We Are by Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan

Among other things undertaken during the hot summer just past, I read *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. The authors have reached celebrity status, an unusual feat for scientists, but that is not why I chose this book from the shelves and shelves available. How contemporary science might try to answer questions concerning who we are and where we came from intrigued me. Science has been given far too little credit for its contributions to answering such questions. We expect scientists to cure diseases and build better toasters, but we usually take questions about who we are elsewhere. Surely there is someone in my neighborhood with a rose and a turban who could answer such questions better than an astronomer, even a renowned astronomer like Carl Sagan.

From the beginning of the book the authors are aware of people's tendency to seek answers about origins from sources other than science. The book is full of quotations from mystics, poets and philosophers Eastern and Western, whose ideas the authors connect to the biological realities of DNA and evolution. This certainly demonstrates that the authors are learned and well-rounded. But for all their learning, they do not confront the popular view that human beings are God's chosen. They focus instead on humanity's close, familial ties to the animal world. To paraphrase the famous opening from the Beatles' "I Am the Walrus," I am an ape, as you are an ape, as we are almost every animal, and we all live together.

This fundamental point, that humans are much closer to animals than they like to admit, is the thread that ties together the narrative that attempts to cover the creation of the earth and the discovery of evolution and its consequences. The point is well made, and is written in a congenial style suitable for popular audiences. The authors spend a fair portion of the book discussing Darwin, his theory of evolution, and public reaction to his ideas. Yet I was struck by a sense that although evolution has been under scientific scrutiny for decades, the general population has little understanding of it.

People should understand enough about evolution not to need this book. Despite the fact that we are close to the end of the twentieth century, we are all still on Darwin's voyage, uncertain of what we will find or how we will interpret our findings. Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan have no doubt that evolution occurs and that people who believe in it can still worship God, but this understanding is certainly not conventional wisdom in our culture. This book may help it to become so, but there is a long way to go and the outcome is doubtful.--Keith Brabender.

Quackery Continued

The last issue of the newsletter summarized part of the talk Roy Auerbach made at the April A.R.T. membership meeting on quackery in science. This article continues that summary. The difference between science and pseudoscience, Roy said, is not always immediately apparent, but becomes clear upon careful investigation.

Pseudoscience is often characterized by a tendency to concern itself with highly comprehensive theories, rather than the modest, incremental theories characteristic of sound science. Pseudoscience is more likely to tackle the origins of the universe than the effects of sunlight on seed germination.

Pseudoscientific findings are likely to be persistently difficult to verify. This happens in science, too, but usually disappears with better research methods.

Scientists often have a modest view of themselves and their work, and feel themselves to be a part of a scientific community. Pseudo scientists often view themselves as geniuses with great contributions to make to humanity who are unjustifiably scorned by mainstream scientists.

Pseudoscientific conclusions are more likely than scientific conclusions to be presented to the public without benefit of evaluation by independent researchers. Finally, the quack scientist is likely to be a lonely figure, working alone and producing totally unexpected findings. Scientists are part of a community of scientists who usually are not surprised at new discoveries because they are compatible with well-understood earlier work.

Roy went on to divide quack scientists into four groups: inventors, outsiders, insiders, and outright frauds. Quack inventors have a strong tendency to repeatedly re-invent things that do not work as claimed. The classic example is the perpetual motion machine, claimed to move perpetually with no energy input. The perpetual motion machine has appeared in countless permutations, all incapable of perpetual motion. Roy divided these machines into two groups. One group he labeled true perpetual motion machines, because they require no outside energy source. These mechanisms, typically an assortment of wheels and weights, would violate the laws of thermodynamics if they actually worked as claimed. The other group of perpetual motion machines appear to work because they tap an unknown or unrecognized energy source. The Dean Drive, invented 25 years ago, is an example of the latter: it was a motorized perpetual motion machine.

Another typical quack invention, also appearing in countless forms, is the black box. Black boxes are typically secret electrical mechanisms claimed to perform remarkable tasks. An example is the E-Meter used by the Church of Scientology in personal counseling. The E-meter is claimed to be a scientific method of determining the causes of psychological problems. In fact it is an assortment of inexpensive electrical parts that does nothing. Another black box quack invention, also proposed as a tool to use in psychological counseling, is Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Energy Collection Box. Reich's Box is as phony as the E-Meter. These devices are two among many other such quack inventions.

In addition to inventors, quack scientists include outsiders, would-be scientists who are not part of legitimate scientific communities. J.G. Barredo is an example of a quack scientist who was an outsider and little known to the public. Barredo was an electro-chemist who left legitimate science to take up residence in a convent and develop unsupported and unsupportable electro-chemical ideas. Celebrity status eluded him, and so his efforts are little known. Bigger waves are made by quack scientists who become well known to the public, like Velikovsky, author of *Worlds in Collision*. Velikovsky's wacky theories about the origin of ancient archaeological sites in the activities of beings from outer space gained considerable currency due to media exposure.

Membership in the scientific community, however, does not insure against quackery. "Insiders" are quack scientists who

are clearly part of the scientific community. Pons and Fleischman, the inventors of cold fusion, were members of mainstream science, although working outside their specialties, when they made their invention, claimed to be a monumental discovery that would result in more cheap energy that humankind would ever need (a typically grandiose quack claim).

Quack scientists also include outright frauds. Fraudulent scientists may use plagiarism, theft of other's ideas, data tampering and other means. Frauds differ from other quack scientists?their claims are more modest, and often their aim is to become well-known and respected in their own scientific fields, rather than to make money through public acceptance of their ideas. Sometimes frauds make claims that, although unsupported at the time, later proved to be true. Isaac Newton and the pioneer geneticist Gregor Mendel are believed to have indulged in this variety of skullduggery-- their experimental results can be shown to be too perfect, lacking the normal variability of honestly collected data.

Roy continued his talk by comparing several areas of sound science with similar areas of pseudoscience, comparing research in superconductivity with research in cold fusion and the Cretaceous catastrophe hypothesis (an attempt to explain the demise of many species in the Cretaceous Period as the result of a single catastrophic event) with Velikovsky's theories. Roy emphasized that sound and pseudoscience are often difficult to distinguish without careful attention to the details of the research and also to the social relationships surrounding the research. To illustrate his point, he described the attempt of the scientific community to determine the merits of cold fusion (a claim that endless amounts of energy could be created from room temperature nuclear fusion).

Instead of focusing on "the scientific method," he focused on characteristics of the scientific community which support sound research and accurate reporting of findings. Most scientists collaborate with their colleagues, rather than working all by themselves. If their results have implications for other fields outside of their own specialties, they discuss the findings with scientists working in those fields. (To be continued in the next issue)- -The Editor.

Santaism--Devil Worship for Dyslexics [an error occurred while processing this directive]